

IMPERATIVES FOR WORKING WITH AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

IMPERATIVES FOR WORKING WITH AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES

by

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ABSTRACT

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This paper is written for those destined to mentor Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), as well as practitioners and policy makers involved in Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction Operations (SSTRO). The paper addresses the quality, training, and execution of the ANSF mentor program, arguing that in most cases, mentors are unprepared to effectively interface with their Afghan counterparts due to the absence of a formal training program that emphasizes Afghan history and culture. The imperatives addressed in this report are based upon one year of personal experience as an Afghan National Army mentor in the Ministry of Defense, along with input from 12 other senior US mentors. The complexity and fluidity of the operating environment supports four recommendations: 1) Establishing an in-country mentor academy for senior coalition mentors; 2) Establishing strategic objectives for mentors; 3) Developing a detailed and extremely close-hold database about Afghan leaders that documents their relationships, tendencies, and progress as leaders; and 4) Establishing systems to begin tracking hard-earned mentor experience in Service personnel systems so the Department of Defense (DoD) can leverage these skills in the future.

IMPERATIVES FOR WORKING WITH AFGHAN SECURITY FORCES

In today's Afghanistan, people are free to speak their minds. They're free to begin to realize dreams. In today's Afghanistan there's a NATO Alliance taking the lead to help provide security for the people of Afghanistan. In today's Afghanistan, the terrorists who once oppressed the Afghan people and threatened our country are being captured and killed by NATO forces and soldiers and police of a free Afghanistan. Times have changed. Our work is bringing freedom. A free Afghanistan helps make this country more secure.

—President George W. Bush
15 February, 2007

For nearly 6 years, the United States, supported by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other members of the international community (IC), has been leading an ambitious program to transform the war-ravaged nation of Afghanistan into a prosperous and stable democracy. What started as a US operation to topple the Taliban regime following the attacks of September 11, 2001, has grown into a substantial international nation-building operation that may take decades to complete. Deployment of the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) marks the first ever NATO deployment outside of the European continent with the expressed goal to transform Afghanistan from a sanctuary for terrorists and Islamic extremists into a stable democratic nation-state that partners with the United States and NATO in the War on Terrorism.

Across all aspects of this historic rebuilding effort, the focus is to either reform dysfunctional programs or systems, or create new ones where none currently exist. And for the citizens of Afghanistan, the 8th poorest nation on earth¹, the trend is more the latter than the former. Central to the 41-nation ISAF security effort is the establishment of an independent and enduring Afghan National Security Force (ANSF)

consisting of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). According to current plans, the US-led development program aims at establishing a 70,000 soldier ANA by 2011, and an 82,000 strong ANP by 2012², each capable of operating independently of external assistance to defeat terrorism within Afghanistan's borders.³

The program to man, train, and equip these forces is extremely complex but delineates clear responsibilities between Afghans and coalition forces. The Afghan government, with considerable advisory support from coalition mentors, is responsible for recruiting (manning), feeding, and paying their security forces. The equipping and training responsibility rests with the coalition forces, which are led by the Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A), a US organization that is augmented by NATO forces. The mission of CSTC-A is to plan, program and implement structural, organizational, institutional and management reforms of the ANSF by providing military and contracted mentors within the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Ministry of Interior (MOI).⁴

Results have been mixed since 2002, but are steadily improving. Within the ANA, which is the more mature of the two programs (5+ years of development versus 3+ years for the ANP), progress has been steady yet always seeming to lag behind US expectations. Despite a budget of \$7.7B⁵, which is programmed to build a 14 Brigade force with an Air Corps and other combat enablers (i.e. engineers, intelligence), the telling facts on the ground today show a deteriorating security environment that is the worst since 2001. According to a recent UN report on security in Afghanistan, rates of insurgent and terrorist violence are up at least 20 percent since 2006.⁶ Presently only

five countries (U.S., Britain, Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands) routinely participate in combat operations with the ANSF against Al Qaeda and other elements of anti-coalition militia (ACM). This dynamic, combined with recent Afghan opinion polls listing fears of rising insecurity⁷, has intensified pressure on the US/NATO and ANSF forces to show results quickly. While popular expectations indicate that things in Afghanistan are going in the right direction,⁸ fighting an insurgency and building a national security force at the same time has complicated matters tremendously. In a recent poll as to who the ultimate victor would be --the government or the Taliban, 40 percent thought the outcome was still a coin toss.⁹ Within the government, although the Parliament enjoys a certain degree of popular legitimacy, it remains a weak and fragmented institution lacking in real functional capacity. Reportedly, many parliamentarians are former war lords or criminals, and a large percentage are barely literate.¹⁰

For the Afghan security sector, the pace of change is blistering. Every facet of their Army and Police Force is currently undergoing simultaneous change. Doctrine, organization, training, material, leadership, personnel, and facilities are all being impacted. Measuring progress has been Afghan-centric, primarily focused on tangible metrics: contracts awarded, buildings constructed, soldiers recruited, equipment procured, or using various subjective metrics to track unit readiness, training, or institutional capabilities. But after almost six years of this approach, it is time to take a new focus by examining the *kind* of security force being built, and how coalition mentors are influencing ANSF development. To do so, one should look to those who directly shape the development of Afghan leaders and units on a daily basis-- ANSF mentors.

Coalition mentors, both military and civilian contractors, represent the face of the development program to the Afghans. How well has the US leadership prepared these mentors to succeed in this very complex operating environment? Is the focus more on what is purchased for the Afghans or how well they use their new-found capabilities? With respect to the *quality* of the force being developed, other questions remain. First, does CSTC-A have strategic goals for their mentor program? With the constant rotation of coalition personnel, do mentors have the time to properly understand the Afghan culture in order to improve their effectiveness? Even more importantly, do the Afghans embrace coalition advice or merely tolerate it? And finally, does the US and NATO have a continuity problem that marginalizes mentor input? After six years, it is time to delve into these questions to ensure that the Afghans accomplish their goal of building a well trained, affordable, representative and professional military and police force that can provide security and uphold the rule of law.¹¹

This paper is written for those destined to serve with Afghan National Security Forces, as well as practitioners and policy makers involved in Stability, Security, Transition and Reconstruction Operations (SSTRO). It is not a critique of ANSF development initiatives currently ongoing, nor does it offer any programmatic recommendations due to the complexity and fluidity of those programs. It does, however, address the quality, training, and execution of the ANSF mentor program, arguing that in most cases, mentors are wholly unprepared to effectively interface with their Afghan counterparts due to the absence of a formal training program that emphasizes the study of Afghan history and culture. Using one year of personal experience as an ANA mentor in the Ministry of Defense, along with input from 12 other

senior US mentors, this paper describes the preparation that US and NATO mentor programs should conduct prior to, and throughout, their deployment. The paper offers four achievable recommendations to improve the quality of the CSTC-A mentor program: 1) Establishing an in-country mentor academy; 2) Establishing mutually acceptable strategic objectives for mentors that are reinforced through daily/weekly dialogue with their Afghan counterparts and back briefed to senior Coalition commanders ; 3) Using input from coalition mentors, develop an extremely close-hold database about Afghan senior leaders that thoroughly documents their relationships, tendencies and general leadership development; and 4) Developing a system for tracking mentor skills in each service personnel system so the DoD can leverage this hard-earned experience in future SSTRO missions.

Imperative #1: Understanding Afghan History and Culture

Every mentor needs some fundamental knowledge of the operating environment in preparation for their deployment. The following three sections of this paper represent the absolute essentials in dealing effectively and harmoniously with a mentor's Afghan counterparts: 1) a baseline knowledge of history and culture; 2) a thorough understanding of the systemic problems across the ANSF program; and 3) a list of Afghan cultural and behavioral tendencies that mentors are certain to encounter.

Assignment as an Afghan military or police mentor is an entirely new and unpredictable experience for most who undertake it. Unlike many other positions working with Western militaries, Afghanistan is not a place where a mentor can simply show up unprepared and operate effectively using Western-style business approaches. Unfortunately, this is precisely what happens with many of the mentors who serve in

Afghanistan. Moreover, for the vast majority of US and NATO personnel, this is the first time each has had the responsibility to mentor an officer or civilian senior to them in rank and warfighting experience. To correct this trend, we need to begin educating ANSF mentors by starting with the basics: geography, history and culture, especially since Afghans actually epitomize their often tragic past. Through these three lenses one can gain immense perspective on why Afghans think and act as they do.

To begin, one need not dig too deeply to determine how Afghanistan's geo-strategic location has cast its people and shaped its history. Just as the geographic location of the United States has been remarkably advantageous throughout its history, the opposite can be said for Afghanistan. In many cases, the people of modern day Afghanistan have had the misfortune of being located along the famous trade routes of the Old Silk Road, which for centuries connected empires in the Middle East, South Asia, Central Asia, and East Asia. The list of conquerors in this territory includes Alexander the Great (326 BC); the Kushans (60-225 AD); the Mongols(1221-1300), Tamerlane (1361), Babur (1504-1530), as well as the empires of Britain (three invasions between 1839-1919) and the Soviet Union (1979-1989). In the 1980s, Afghanistan's jihad against the Soviets and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan (DRA) drew worldwide attention and brought covert support from the US and other allies, ultimately enabling the vastly outnumbered Mujahideen to exhaust the will of the USSR.¹² During the period of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan (1989) and the collapse of the Communist government (1992), Afghans entered a period of bloody Civil War. Between 1990-2001, prominent former Mujahideen groups, along with a Kandahar-based Pashtun group known as the Taliban, waged an unprecedented struggle for

control of Afghanistan. While largely ignored by the Western world, the Afghan Civil War was devastating to the country's infrastructure, economy, and people, underscoring ethnic division, ultimately leaving the hard-line Taliban regime in control of the government in 1996.¹³ By the time Operation Enduring Freedom started in late 2001, the country had been at war for over 20 years.

The internal geography of Afghanistan is the second significant influence on societal development. Bisected by the 966 kilometer Hindu Kush Mountain range, which has impeded internal movement for centuries, the terrain has both protected and isolated the population. This isolation has fueled tribalism, fragmenting the country across all aspects of society, and most notably impacting the establishment of an effective central government, which is a cornerstone to the current international development effort. Afghanistan is an agrarian society, yet only 12 percent of the 647,500 square kilometers of land is arable.¹⁴ This limiting factor puts immense pressure on the agricultural industry given the lack of quality transportation networks (poor roads and no rail lines), war-damaged irrigation systems, and the widespread use of primitive farming techniques. The illicit poppy industry, which fuels the opium trade, produces the country's largest export crop. The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime reports that Afghanistan continues to lead the world in opium production, with 2008 production levels estimated to be down only slightly from the 2007 record harvest.¹⁵ Poppy growth, which yields farmers 5-10 times more profit than wheat, is closely linked to funding the current insurgency in Afghanistan, with drug lords, war lords, government officials, and extremists establishing mutual dependencies (e.g. raw opium or drug money for security).¹⁶ Despite continual international efforts to reduce

poppy growth, the drug trade remains a major destabilizing force in the country. In many cases, the centuries long problem of little or no government presence in the majority of the provinces has promoted lawlessness, corruption, loyalties to local leaders, and a persistent lack of confidence in an effective central government.

Other aspects of Afghan society tell a similar story. Despite billions of dollars in international support poured into Afghanistan since 2002, the nation is still one of the most impoverished in the world. According to figures in table 1 from the CIA World Factbook and www.geographyiq.com, Afghanistan ranks near the very bottom of world rankings in some critical demographic categories, each of which has direct bearing on the progress of current development initiatives.

Category	Statistics	World Rank
Infant Mortality	157.43 of 1000 Live Births	204 of 207
Life Expectancy	43.77 Years	195 of 208
Literacy	Age 15> who can read & write 23.5%	205 of 208
GDP per capita	\$800/year	205 of 210
Unemployment	40%	169 of 182

Table 1.

Two final factors that must be understood are the impacts of ethnicity and language. Afghanistan has four dominant ethnic groups (Pashtun, 42 percent; Tajik, 27 percent; Hazara, 9 percent; Uzbek, 9 percent) and many other smaller groups. From a mentor perspective, it is important to know that ethnic divisions are real, but often difficult to detect, despite the current policy of ethnic balance in the ANSF. For example, the Afghan officer that I mentored was the only Hazara who served as a primary staff

officer on the ANA General Staff. Hazaras have traditionally been persecuted in Afghan society, so he perceived his position to be both prominent and tenuous at the same time. With this recognition foremost in his mind, he made no major decisions without thinking carefully about how it might affect his position on the General Staff.

Despite sometimes bitter ethnic tensions, the ANSF appears to be working to inculcate an “Afghan First” mentality across their force, where soldiers and police officers think of themselves as Afghans first, and not identify specifically with their ethnic group or tribe. The influence of ethnicity has profound implications for patronage, nepotism and other corruption. Moreover, ethnic divisions may be further complicated by fighting that took place between ethnic groups during the Soviet/Afghan and Civil Wars. During this period, killings along ethnic lines were commonplace. A mentor may never quite know how deep the mistrust and anger goes between different ethnic tribes, but it is clearly a factor in how Afghans interact with each other.

Language is another major obstacle. Afghanistan has two official national languages, Dari (50 percent) and Pashto (35 percent), as well as the Turkic languages (Uzbek and Turkmen) at 11 percent. No greater barrier exists between Afghans and coalition forces than in written and oral communications. Communication is further complicated by the various dialects, ethnic biases against interpreters, and the sometimes poor quality of the interpreters used by the coalition. Reliance on interpreters is essential and sometimes problematic if they are inexperienced and have difficulty translating certain English words or concepts into Dari and Pashto. Working with inexperienced interpreters makes translating true meaning and intent extremely difficult, as well as time consuming. Even with an experienced interpreter, communication takes

twice as long as speaking directly. Mentors must work assiduously to ensure their written and oral communication is clear and understood in both directions. Conversely, because of coalition difficulties in speaking the native Afghan languages, mentors are reluctant to attempt much more than polite greetings. Mentors who can read or write Dari or Pashto are rare. This language divide continues to impede progress and should not be underestimated in its effect on development in all areas of reform. Despite these challenges, mentors should still strive to learn as much as possible of the native language of their counterpart as a sign of cultural respect and solidarity. During Vietnam, for example, US advisors went to a five week Military Assistance Training Advisor Course taught by Special Forces personnel that included cultural and language instruction by Vietnamese instructors.¹⁷ Use of language was my most effective tool in building and maintaining rapport with my Afghan counterparts, and coincidentally, my efforts were not lost on his staff, either. To personalize the exchanges, I used my favorite English phrases translated into Dari, as well as common military terms that routinely were exchanged during daily dialogue. The effort was both personally and professionally rewarding, and by the end of my tour, I was even jokingly “accused” of eavesdropping on some Afghan conversations (as my Dari vocabulary allowed). Afghans respect those who endeavor to learn their language(s), and as much as possible, we should take the time to do so. This initiative will build bridges and enhance cultural awareness like few other activities can.

When put into context, these historical and geographical factors are important in understanding how each has shaped Afghan outlook and world view. Notwithstanding the oppressive Taliban regime, which brutalized the populace by imposing extreme

interpretations of Islamic law, the history of Afghanistan has been remarkably consistent throughout the centuries. For over two millennia, invasions, foreign interventions, poverty, isolation, tribalism, and fatalism have cultivated an enduring identity that cannot be overlooked; Afghans are survivors. And as such, they will sometimes act in ways that US and NATO personnel cannot comprehend. Moreover, over half the current population of nearly 32 million has known nothing but war for their entire lives. This cultural backdrop is relevant to understand the effect that aggressive reforms have on a people scarred by a lifetime of war and poverty.

Imperative #2: Understanding the Overarching ANSF Challenges

The list of systemic and institutional problems that exist in the present-day Afghan security sector is staggering yet understandable when put into perspective. The challenge for mentors, however, is gaining the *proper* perspective fast enough to avoid continuity gaps that arise during changeover. It should take 6-10 weeks, not 6-10 months, for a mentor to develop the proper awareness of the current security challenges. This is crucial in providing informed, consistent mentorship to the Afghans, all the while reducing stress on mentors who many times cannot understand why progress is slow or elusive. Failure to properly gain the necessary situational awareness leads to frustration, conflict, and general resistance between Afghans and their mentors. Environmental knowledge informs personal judgments, tempers expectations, and helps mentors develop realistic expectations for what is possible in Afghanistan. Experience has shown that the most enduring changes in the ANSF will only occur through consistency and repetition across many years and many mentors.

Table 2 below lists a number of the major challenges in the ANA program today, many of which can be applied to the ANP. While full understanding can only be truly developed through time spent in Afghanistan, initial knowledge is essential in lowering the tendency to press reforms faster than the Afghans may be capable of implementing them. This list was compiled primarily through attending US program reviews and time spent with my Afghan counterpart. While certainly not comprehensive, this list constitutes much of the focus for the current reform efforts ongoing by CSTC-A.

Enduring Challenges in the ANA Program

Age of Leadership and No Training for Successors	Absence of Rule of Law	Poor Institutional Effectiveness
Literacy	Weak NCO Corps	Corruption at All Levels
Impacts of Soviet Leadership Model	Lack of Separation of Church/State	Poor Leadership Development Programs
Poor Logistics Systems	Poor Soldier Care	Lack of Adequate Facilities
Inadequate Pay and Promotion Systems	Poor Short & Long Term Planning Skills	Poor Basic Training and Advanced Individual Training
Equipment Shortages	Poor Safety Climate	Lack of Established Doctrine
Impacts of Missing the Information Age	No National Communications & Intelligence Infrastructures	Poor Knowledge of Info Technology Systems
Fighting While Reforming	Language Barriers and Dual National Languages	Lack of Established Medical Systems
Recruiting and Retention	Pressure of Time; Needing to Show Progress	For ANSF: Unknown of Long Term Coalition Support
Variance of Donated Equipment	US Budget Cycles & Predictability of Funds	Maintaining, Training, & Sustaining Fielded Equipment
Variance in US mentors	Tribal Influence on Leaders	Complexity of Ethnic Balance

Table 2.

Each challenge is, in varying degrees, related to the environment of poverty and war that Afghans have lived with throughout their lives. Understanding each as a separate problem is a start, but it is imperative to understand their interconnectedness. In what follows, I will offer my observations regarding some of the more pressing challenges that routinely confront mentors.

The first major challenge is the influence of centralized decision making, also called the Soviet Leadership Model. The pervasiveness of centralized decision making across the ANA can be startling to the uninformed observer or new mentor. The US military prides itself on centralized planning and decentralized execution, empowering subordinates to take initiative to accomplish even the most routine tasks. With Afghans, this is not the case. In their world, information is power, and senior leaders intent on keeping power often maintain a solid grip on information, paralyzing subordinates into doing nothing until specifically ordered. Taking risk or initiative has historically been seen as a good way to wind up in prison or dead.¹⁸ Moreover, sharing too much information may be viewed by a senior leader as a sign of weakness that increases risk to their positions. In the ANA, for example, this is a principle reason why the non-commissioned officer is not empowered to train, care for, and lead soldiers. In many cases, officers are performing the role of the NCOs.¹⁹ Again, failure to develop and empower an NCO corps is a product of the Soviet Leadership system. Staff meetings to share information with subordinates do not routinely occur, leaving staffs uninformed or misguided. Even routine requisitions for basic office supplies are tightly controlled by paper-based processes that are hand delivered through dozens of personnel until approved by a senior leader. Everything must run through the senior leader. The result of this approach is the stagnation of initiative, intra-staff communications, and ultimately the training needed to grow the next generation of future leaders at all levels. The core issue is the willingness to trust others, which is many times exacerbated by fear, ethnic loyalty, and tribal affiliation. One should be quick to recognize that at this point in their development, trust is not something that Afghans grant easily outside of their ethnic

groups. Ultimately, mistrust among Afghans will only be mitigated through time as our mentors continue to demonstrate the value of teamwork and the progress that results when leaders empower subordinates.

A second major challenge that permeates all aspects of ANSF capabilities is the lack of a formal training and education system for soldiers and police officers. The absence of a lifelong education system before and during military/public service has produced a shell of a force that is marginally capable in many areas. This deficiency must be corrected in the next two decades or Afghanistan will not be able to sustain the quality of professional security forces that we envision. Basic literacy, knowledge of ethics, communications, cooperation, and fundamental professional expertise, both technical and tactical, remain the greatest hurdles to overcome. This challenge is especially pronounced in the ANP, where a large portion of the historically corrupt national police force was reformed (retained) and not replaced. Mentors must be aware of this reality as they introduce what are largely 21st century concepts, processes, and equipment to a force that is in no way prepared to handle their complexity. In many cases, what the ANSF needs is not the 21st century US military, but more the processes and equipment of the 1980s US military. In practical terms, this idea requires that we take a more realistic view of the training and equipping initiatives being introduced. Literacy programs now ongoing in the ANSF, combined with an increase of literate soldiers being recruited from the public school systems, will go far to correct this major deficiency. Currently, over 5 million Afghan children are attending school, which is more than 6 times the number that attended school during the Taliban era.²⁰ Additionally, the establishment of more robust training and education programs in the ANSF will further

populate the forces with more capable personnel. For the next 5-10 years, however, the education level of the ANSF will remain severely degraded. As a result of this situation, the Afghans appear to be more willing than they are able to perform certain tasks. It is vital, however, that mentors not interpret the opposite condition, where Afghans appear able, but not willing, to do things that coalition mentors have recommended. This assessment of selective non-compliance (willfully ignoring coalition advice) by the Afghans is a common misconception by new mentors.

A third major challenge that impedes development efforts relates to the use of advanced technology and the advent of the information age. Afghanistan, for all intents and purposes, missed the information age. Beginning in the 1980s, while the majority of the developed world was gradually learning about Information Technology (IT), personal computing, and the internet, Afghanistan was isolated and slowly being destroyed by war. The level of destruction during this period was so complete that it can be summarized simply—no pre-war physical entities were untouched.²¹ Nearly three ruinous decades later, Afghans are still picking up the pieces. Whether in governance, medicine, finance, education, engineering, or the military, the entire society is severely lagging behind other developing nations. These challenges, combined with decades of educational stagnation, put the country at a severe disadvantage. Now Afghanistan, with its largely uneducated populace, must learn simultaneously what the Western world learned incrementally.

Afghanistan remains a voice and paper-centric society that relies heavily on human interaction and personal relationships to get things done. Again, credit this phenomenon to their culture and pervasive poverty. Technology offers expedient yet

impersonal remedies that go against Afghan culture and practices. Where Afghans strive to maintain control and strengthen relationships, coalition mentors push process, efficiency, and results, often in conflict with Afghan preferences. For example, in the area of procurement law, which accurately details a merit-based acquisition approach, a senior ANA logistics official has had great difficulty in separating personal influence and relationships from major procurement decisions.²² Mentors should be aware that advances in IT may not be readily accepted nor understood by a culture that relies heavily on written or oral communications. Not surprisingly, the cell phone is the main technology being used across the society because it is simple to use and leans to the Afghan affinity towards oral communications.

Overall, the complexity and interrelatedness of the overarching ANSF challenges should be inculcated early with mentors in order to help them frame the environment and set realistic goals with their counterparts. Failure to do so may lead to significant frustration and conflicts that could be easily avoided with better awareness of the operating environment.

Imperative #3: Eight Things All Mentors Should Know About Working with Afghans

The final piece of preparatory knowledge that mentors must recognize is a list of Afghan tendencies and personal characteristics. For veteran mentors, much of this information is well understood, but only as a result of personal experience and trial and error. The “How to Mentor Afghans” manual does not exist, and for this reason, most new mentors enter their positions with only a cursory understanding of the level of difficulty and frustration that they will encounter, regardless of their good intentions. Working with Afghans can be both frustrating and rewarding, and an unprepared mentor

is sure to experience more of the former than the latter. To alleviate this eventuality, here follow eight hard-earned insights that are imperative in assisting mentors in their daily interactions with their counterparts.

Lesson 1) Afghans are often notoriously poor communicators; both written and oral. Besides issuing little guidance or intent to subordinates, they are historically inefficient at documenting anything. This tendency presumably helps them avoid responsibility or accountability for their actions, which are two other related common shortcomings. The language barrier between mentors and mentees, and the variance in interpreter skills, further complicates this problem. Professional embarrassment between Afghans is avoided at all costs, especially in confronting one's boss. In many cases, getting things right is secondary to making the boss look good, even if he is clearly wrong or misguided. Using detailed lists or other task tracking methodologies is not a common or well understood method of following actions through to completion; a "God Willing" mentality persists which delays progress for all routine and major actions. Because of this fatalist approach, even the most routine actions can take an inordinate amount of time to accomplish. For this reason, mentors must be prepared to work on "Afghan time."

Lesson 2) On a related theme, Afghans often display little or no time management skills. Unlike the Western world, where the "time is money" mentality is well entrenched, time is not seen as a valuable resource in Afghan society. As a result, most events occur late or not at all, and certainly not according to a set schedule. Planning is a major weakness that is inextricably linked to this outlook on time. As a general rule, Western societies are time and task driven, and this approach shapes their methods in

organizing, delegating, and tracking the progress of multiple tasks. Afghans can be exactly the opposite, often appearing unorganized when it comes to managing multiple tasks simultaneously. Correspondingly, the use of calendars at all levels is virtually non-existent. To alleviate this shortcoming, I always had a written agenda that was reviewed with my counterpart during every meeting, showing him the value of written products, item lists, and status tracking. After only a short time, he came to rely on this technique to track his many projects and actions, and he even changed the way he conducted his weekly staff meetings (once those were started). Unfortunately, until Afghans begin to value time as we do, and improve their communications skills, many of the management and leadership techniques we espouse will go largely unheeded.

Lesson 3) Integrity is another complicated matter. The way Afghans demonstrate integrity, honesty, and sincerity often leads to conflicts or misunderstandings between mentors and their counterparts. Mentors should tread lightly here but also be aware of the potential pitfalls that await them. When it comes to integrity, the way coalition mentors and their Afghan counterparts see things is often diametrically opposed. As one mentor professed, lying, cheating, and stealing are accepted personal faults that are considered a personal weakness of the individual instead of an affront to the victim.²³ Another mentor saw it more from an Afghan point of view, stating that one culture's honor and responsibility to care for family is another culture's nepotism.²⁴ The lesson for new mentors is not to rush to judgment as you establish both professional, and hopefully, personal relationships with your counterparts. It is unlikely that any coalition mentor will ever quite see things the Afghan way based on our Western frame of reference, which is why this topic should be fully addressed at the mentor academy.

The Afghan approach to integrity is clearly influenced, in large part, by their survivalist mentality, familial support responsibilities, and overall outlook towards the future. Unlike Americans, Afghans often have a dim view on the future, which is generally based on their low confidence in the stability of public institutions. For most Afghans, tomorrow may not be better than today, and in fact, it may be worse. But based on their history, this outlook is completely consistent. The “live for today” approach helps explain why some seek to maintain their positions at the expense of certain values, not the least of which is their integrity. Only through time, personal example, an increasing confidence in their government and public institutions, and an improved quality of life, may the value and consistency of integrity be elevated in their society.

Lesson 4) Professional competence and knowledge in many fields is suspect. The persistent lack of quality civilian and military education systems has irrefutably damaged the capabilities of the Afghan security forces. Do not assume that your counterparts, regardless of their rank, are as technically and tactically competent as you are. In most cases, they are not. In the medical field, for example, an Afghan doctor in the third year of residency may be comparable in knowledge to a third year U.S. medical student.²⁵ Most ANA Colonels are not nearly as capable as junior U.S. company-grade officers. While the coalition promotes merit-based promotions, many Afghan promotions are based solely on proven loyalty, familial ties, patronage or tribal affiliation. Displaying professional competence within this system is a bonus. Keep this in mind as new tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as advanced technology, are introduced. Afghans are proud and courteous, and will never admit not understanding a particular point, especially when their mentor is knowledgeable in that area. It should not be

assumed that they understand the points even if they are nodding in approval. Take the time to respectfully ensure that what is being communicated is understood. Encourage dialogue, being aware that large meetings inhibit questions. Remember, that for your counterpart, saving face, remaining loyal, and looking good is more important than getting the answer right.

Lesson 5) Many senior Afghan leaders are tactical, not strategic, thinkers. Mr. Hal McKinney, who has mentored Strategy and Policy leaders in the Ministry of Defense (MOD) for over three years, said that there were only 6-7 personnel in the MOD who effectively understood the strategy documents of the ministry. In fact, there should have been 40-50 personnel with this kind of understanding.²⁶ Mentors working with Afghan senior leaders must be prepared to face an environment where trivial daily tasks are not delegated to subordinates to accomplish, but are handled exclusively by General Officers. Instead of making policy, or developing strategic direction, Afghan senior leaders are effectively doing the tasks of non-commissioned officers or junior officers. The disparity between rank and strategic experience is alarming. Mentors must seek to encourage delegation of authority and trust in subordinates, and keep their counterparts focused on items appropriate to their level of leadership. Afghans must see the value added to them before they will embrace this approach.

Lesson 6) In most cases, Afghans are more concrete than conceptual thinkers. Much of the way that the Western world views strategy and vision is through high-level concepts and diagrams. Advanced civilian and military education systems help our forces develop the skills to translate strategic direction into operational reality. Afghans seem to have difficulty in doing this kind of work, but not because they are incapable.

They are simply unfamiliar and untrained. Vague and often broad language does not resonate with their leadership, and often confuses them. The use of visual aids during mentoring is absolutely essential to help bridge the language barrier and overcome the problem with conceptual thinking. Use of white boards and simple diagrams is very effective, especially in conveying new ideas to large audiences. Like the written products mentioned earlier, use of visual tools is essential to draw out questions and encourage dialogue. Do not be afraid to use cartoons to get the point across. A well timed drawing can sometimes save hours of difficult discussion.

Lesson 7) Afghans' fascination with technology can far exceed their ability to use it. Not surprisingly, Afghans are eager to get the most advanced technology available. In many cases, however, they have no idea of how to effectively leverage it. For many, simply having the latest technology is a status symbol that reinforces their importance. Use of automation, networks, and video teleconference capability is one example where newer, faster, and better is always in demand. New computers often go unused, sitting wrapped in their original plastic on desks. Mentors sometimes presume that this situation is our problem to solve, mistakenly throwing more money at what is usually a training issue. Regardless of the technology, it is important for mentors to correlate the relevance of new technology with the Afghans' ability to use it.

As an example, the issue of encrypting the Afghan National Army tactical radio networks was a pressing dilemma that needed a solution. The anti-coalition militia had been listening to un-encrypted radio transmissions for years and the ANA needed a remedy. Should none, all, or some of the radios be encryption-capable? After a cost benefit analysis, and applying the "1980's US military" approach described earlier, we

decided to purchase an internal encryption card for approximately 30 percent of their tactical radios based on operational requirements, fielding plans, and the current ANA training capabilities. The decision to expand the encryption program will be pushed to the future only after the ANA has proved the value of the initial investment. In another communications example, we were surprised to learn of the Afghan propensity to use fax machines to transmit hard-copy information instead of passing data over their newly installed e-mail network. Why fax documents when email was available? Simply, the desire to hold paper in their hands as opposed to data on a disk made fax machines more attractive. This important first step demonstrates the need to gradually introduce technological advances in a manner similar to what the Western world learned in the 1980s. While the Afghans may ask for the best technology available, it may not be what they need based on their current capabilities.

Lesson 8) Relationships and respect are extremely important to Afghans. Taking the time to get to know the Afghans you work with will pay enormous dividends in any and all initiatives. Retired Army LTG David W. Barno, the first Commander of the Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan, stated aptly that successfully working with Afghans has a lot to do with personality and attitude.²⁷ Drinking tea and socializing is a fundamental part of Afghan culture that should not be rushed by an overbearing and impatient mentorship approach. Be thoroughly prepared for every session so that you can expertly weave in business around the social rhythm of your counterpart. Being a great listener is paramount to being an effective mentor, as is displaying empathy, patience, and genuine respect and humility. Let your relationship develop and avoid being judgmental. Rushing an agenda or program will most likely backfire, especially

since Afghan resistance is routinely shrouded in cultural courtesy. Treat your counterpart as a respected equal in thought and deed and recognize the position of respect that the Afghans grant Americans. Violation of this trust is, in most cases, irreversible. Some of the most important and effective diplomacy you will conduct is with your ears and not your mouth.

While certainly not complete, these eight insights can easily be used as a basis for discussion between new and experienced mentors. Prior to arriving, most of the training I received on Afghan culture was simply self-study CD's focused on what *not* to do to offend an Afghan. While important, these references did not fundamentally address how Afghans would work and interact with us. Even after arriving, no program was available to help prepare me for the first meeting with my counterpart. For a military that prides itself on improving operations over time, much more can and should be done to prepare our mentors for the relationships that need to be developed with the Afghans.

To that end, I offer the following recommendations to help prepare coalition mentors for their duties in Afghanistan, and with careful monitoring, to help improve the *quality* of mentoring being offered to the ANSF. The approach should be to train new US and NATO mentors in basic diplomatic skills that are thoroughly informed by a fundamental understanding of the Afghan culture, society, history, and overall operating environment.

Recommendations to Improve the ANSF Mentor Program

1) Establish a one week in-country mentor academy conducted 3-4 times each year. This template should be flexible enough to accommodate the varying schedules of incoming mentors. CSTC-A should lead the effort, with support from the Department of

State (DoS), ISAF, and relevant Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) which could offer insights on certain aspects of current Afghan society. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Food Program are examples of organizations who could offer contemporary insights on societal progress that would far exceed any printed literature available. The intent of this immersion program is to indoctrinate newcomers with the three imperatives outlined in this report, as well as other contemporary topics, such as updates on intelligence and tactical operations, the ANSF security assistance program, human development progress, and institutional development initiatives. The DoS should brief the operating environment (Imperative #1), which would include the cultural and historical high points that have shaped the development of the current Afghan political and security leadership. Moreover, a mandatory reading list of 3-6 books should be made available prior to and during deployment for mentor self-study. CSTC-A can brief a comprehensive ANSF program update, complete with descriptions of the overarching challenges (Imperative #2) common to the ANA and ANP programs. ISAF should brief a current operations and intelligence update that is coordinated with the CSTC-A development efforts in each of the five regions. The rationale for this coordination is to avoid conflicts between current ISAF operational intelligence and CSTC-A's reports on ANSF progress. A description of Afghan tendencies and personal characteristics (Imperative #3) should be briefed by a group of trusted in-country personnel who may come from any and all groups briefing at the academy. The key with this session is to ensure that each instructor has had at least one year of experience serving directly with Afghans. As is clearly evident, Afghan cultural knowledge is not information that can simply be read from a script. It is highly

recommended that experienced contractors and NGO's such as MPRI mentors and the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) personnel be used for this session.

2) Establish mutually acceptable strategic goals for the ANSF mentor program. Within the CSTC-A program today, many measures of effectiveness are being used to assess progress. Most notably, the use of Capabilities Milestones (CM) ratings is consistent across all aspects of the ANA and ANP assessments. The CM ratings are the focus of weekly and monthly reports, and form the basis for numerous program adjustments for manning, training, and equipping the force. For the mentor program, no such assessment program exists. I am not suggesting a CM system for mentors; however, establishing strategic developmental goals with their counterparts is important. Without mentor goals, you have what exists today, which is an ad hoc effort that is inconsistent and somewhat confusing to Afghans.

Areas to evaluate include communications, writing, staffing, delegation, and other intangibles. The focus of these strategic goals is to ensure that the management and leadership skills being developed by the ANSF will be enduring. Weekly progress meetings between mentors are essential to cross-walk major actions routing through the senior staffs to gauge the effectiveness of information dissemination, technology use, and problem solving abilities within Afghan circles.

This meeting should not focus on Afghan tasks that are being personally completed by the mentors, which is a common occurrence. A persistent problem seen in the mentor program is that Afghans routinely rely on eager and cooperative mentors to get things done instead of using their own personnel or organizations. Mentors cannot continue to be "work-arounds" for dysfunctional Afghan leaders or staffs. One of

the mentor strategies should be a top driven effort to force Afghans to solve many of their own problems and reduce mentors direct involvement. This point is important during mentor changeover, when new mentors get unknowingly coerced into doing things for Afghans that the previous mentor may have spent months teaching and training the Afghans to do for themselves. Overall, strategic goals will ensure consistency and continuity between personnel on both sides, and over time, will bring more concrete measures for tracking success.

3) Establish a close-hold System of Systems Analysis (SOSA) of key Afghan leadership. Mentors learn a tremendous amount of personal and professional information about their counterparts over the course of a 6-15 month tour. The problem is that practically none of that knowledge is captured in a document that can be updated and passed to new personnel. Presently, CSTC-A maintains biographies on Afghan senior leaders, which have some value for those interested in reading them. I recommend that the information base on Afghan leaders be dramatically expanded and routinely updated by every mentor, as well as become mandatory reading for mentors upon their arrival.

The information should include background, skills, tendencies, weaknesses, relationships, external influences, etc. At the start of the tour, mentors will be charged with validating that current information base on their counterpart and updating it throughout their tours. Prior to departing, senior ANSF mentors will be responsible for conducting a back brief about their mentee and his progress in the past year. Currently we have no system in place that captures the enormous amount of valuable information

we gather about our counterparts. Feedback from the out briefs can be correlated against the strategic mentor goals and used to make course adjustments as necessary.

4) The final recommendation is fairly simple: the DoD personnel system must begin to track those personnel who have been foreign military mentors. A short code that delineates those who have served in Afghanistan, Iraq, or other countries, as military or foreign government mentors is essential as we look to a future that will inevitably involve more nation-building missions. DoD Directive 3000.5, dated 28 November 2005, makes Stability Operations “a core U.S. military mission that the DoD shall be prepared to conduct and support.”²⁸ To prepare for this mission, the DoD must now devise a system to identify and track personnel who are experienced in mentoring during SSTR operations. Easily knowing who has served in these critical and demanding mentor positions should not be a mystery to the personnel assignment system. Regrettably, until we devise a system to monitor those who have mentored, tracking these new soldier-statesmen will remain extremely difficult.

Too much valuable experience has been accumulated since 2002 to continue our current ad hoc approaches. There are “open fields” of data in every personnel system that could be designated for such a function of tracking military mentor experience. It seems logical to expect this delineation to appear on an officer record brief (ORB) or equivalent NCO report. If we do not begin documenting these experiences then many years of priceless knowledge may go wasted in future nation building operations.

Final Thoughts

The ANSF development program run by CSTC-A is enormously complex and extremely dynamic. After nearly six years, it has been, by most anyone’s standards, a

remarkable success story. The Afghan National Army and Police Forces have developed capabilities that have put the country on a positive track to achieve the goal of providing enduring national security forces that are capable of independent operations to protect Afghanistan against internal threats.

As this report has documented, many challenges lay ahead for the nation and its people. But even with the complexities of the operating environment, the future for the ANSF is bright. The Afghans are a proud, confident, and honorable people who do not want to go back to a life of misery and war. Those who have served there know well that the Afghans *want* our support and are grateful for the efforts of the entire international community. The US and NATO efforts have greatly assisted the Afghan government in its development and will continue to do so in the future.

As we look to an uncertain future where long term US national support is always a subject of discussion, it is imperative that we maximize our development efforts across all fronts. Improving the ANSF mentor program will go far to expand our overall effectiveness in this historic endeavor.

Endnotes

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